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ABSTRACT

This paper describes "The Huck Finn Experience," a high motivation interdisciplinary unit that takes students on a 6-week journey back to the life and times of Mark Twain through the fictional character of Huckleberry Finn. The unit described in the paper was designed for eighth-grade students but could be easily adapted to be successful with grades 7 through 12, and takes into consideration the many different ability levels of students. The paper presents an outline of the 6-week unit and a list of resources needed for the unit. Activities in the unit described in the paper include writing newspapers, linking up with pen pals in Missouri, exploring a cemetery, climbing a mountain, cooking a Southern meal, learning blue printing and raft construction, and studying buoyancy and density. The paper notes that the more than 90 students involved in the unit came away feeling positive about their accomplishments and their contributions to the project. (RS)

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THE HUCK FINN

ED 378 590

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EXPERIENCE

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General Description:

The HUCK FINN EXPERIENCE is a high motivation level interdisciplinary unit that takes students on a six week journey back to the life and times of Mark Twain through the fictional character of Huckleberry Finn. This unit was designed for eighth grade students but could be easily adapted to be successful with grades seven through twelve.

Purpose / Goals / Objectives:

Research indicates students learn best from what they attempt to teach others, so this unit provides a wide variety of "hands-on" experiences across the curriculum. The project starts with the structure of an author, a novel and a particular time in history. and then there is no limit to where the students can go. Eighth graders worked together to write newspapers, link up with pen pals in Missouri, explore a cemetery, climb a mountain, cook a Southern meal, line dance, re-live the excitement of a Box Social, learn blue printing and raft construction, do comparative shopping, study about buoyancy and density, and more...

The Students and The Target Audience:

The project is suitable for grades seven through twelve at all levels. It takes into consideration the many different ability levels of students by letting each take part at their own level of competency in all that is done. Students are able to meet a high degree of success through a wide variety of approaches such as cooperative learning, drama,art, hand-on construction and other varied learning styles.

Outline of The Huck Finn Unit:

WEEK ONE

1. Give students an overview of the total project.
2. Select TEAMS and choose Team Captains.
3. Set up the rules that everyone needs to follow and the consequences if the rules are broken.
4. Introduce Mark Twain.
5. Watch the video "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer".
6. Begin to read "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn".
7. Start the pen pal search in English class.

WEEK TWO

1. Continue to read Huck Finn.
2. Science class starts to work on buoyancy, density, flotation, etc.
3. Math class looks at blueprinting and drawing to scale.
4. Research for the historical fiction newspapers starts in history class
5. Students watch the video "Life On The Mississippi".

WEEK THREE

1. Huck Finn reading continues.
2. Trip One to Weld to the cemetery and to climb the mountain.
3. Teams meet to begin to design rafts.
4. Contra-dancing and Fiddling Demonstrations
5. Students work in pairs to write, edit and publish newspapers.
6. Students are doing commercials about Missouri in English class.

WEEK FOUR

1. Finish the Huck Finn novel.
2. Role playing by TEAMS from Huck Finn or Tom Sawyer.
3. Maine Humorist visits classes.
4. Comparative shopping done in math classes to check for best values on materials for raft construction.

5. TEAMS meet for final strategies on what is needed from home, etc.. for raft construction.
6. CIVIL WAR MEDICINE lecture - Dr. Paul Brinkman, Farmington, ME 04938

WEEK FIVE

1. Watch the latest "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" video.
2. Lots of block timing for raft construction.
3. TEAM leaders design and cook the Southern meal for all students.

WEEK SIX

1. Trip Two to Weld to float the rafts and have contests.
2. Box Social
3. Give out tee shirts and students do project evaluations.

Resources:

- 1 copy of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn per student
- flyers from local lumber companies for comparative shopping
- stamps to mail pen pal letters (students brought $.29 or a stamp)
- library to do research for newspapers
- video camera to record commercials
- volunteers - contra dancing, fiddler, Maine humorist, lifeguards for raft flotation, Civil War Medicine - Dr. Paul Brinkman
- food for Southern meal (parents supplied)
- decorations and shoe boxes for Box Social
- food for Box Social (students used lunch money and cafeteria helped)
- materials for raft construction - 1 sheet of plywood, 6 - 2'x4'x8', nails (students came up with their own flotation ideas and brought those materials from home - i.e. - barrels, inner tubes, styrofoam)
- videos - "Life On The Mississippi"
  "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer"
  "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"
- construction paper and crayons for the gravestone rubbings

- tee shirts (optional) with "THE HUCK FINN EXPERIENCE" logo - these were about $3.50/shirt for good quality

The students sold stationary, had a bake sale and hosted a school dance to raise money to supplement this project. Including tee shirts, it cost about $600 to do everything.

Wrap-up:

The success of THE HUCK FINN EXPERIENCE is measured by the outcome of the projects and the tasks the students undertake. Some concrete grades are given for quizzes and tests given over the novel, but the majority of the evaluation is done by the students themselves through discussion and reflection on how they felt about the success/failure of what they accomplished. The bonding they gain though group effort, brainstorming and teamwork is an experience they won't soon forget.

The fact we effectively involved 90+ students of all ability levels in something educational at the end of the school year, that they came away knowing time was not wasted and each and every student felt positive about his/her accomplishments and contributions to the project has to be the strongest statement we can make in support of THE HUCK FINN EXPERIENCE.